

## REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and the following remarks, reconsideration of the rejections contained in the Office Action of September 9, 2003 is respectfully requested.

The rejections in the outstanding Office Action are similar to the rejections set forth in the previous Office Action of April 2, 2003. However, the Nishibori '869 reference (USP 4,505,869) applied in the previous Office Action has now been replaced with the Nishibori '138 reference (USP 5,869,138). Thus, the Examiner has now rejected claims 15-19, 21, 24 and 27 as being unpatentable over the Nakada reference in view of the Nishibori '138 reference; and has rejected claims 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, and 29 as being unpatentable over the Nakada reference, the Nishibori '138 reference, the Young, Jr. reference, the Kiyoshi reference and the Uchida reference. However, as indicated above, independent claim 15 has now been slightly amended so as to clarify the distinctions between the present invention and the prior art. For the reasons discussed below, it is respectfully submitted that claims 15-29 are clearly patentable over the prior art of record.

Amended independent claim 15 is directed to a steering wheel that comprises an annular rim section including a core and *arcuate-shaped* and elongated rim elements mounted on the core. Each of the elongated rim elements is formed of thermosoftening synthetic resin material blended with woodmeal so as to have *an outer surface of the thermosoftening synthetic resin material and the woodmeal*, with an outer surface annular streak pattern extending along a longitudinal axis of each of the elongated rim elements.

As explained in the remarks submitted June 30, 2003, the present invention provides a steering wheel that accurately replicates a specific, desirable grain pattern of wood by providing an outer surface annular streak pattern extending along a longitudinal axis of each of the elongated rim elements. However, because the outer surface annular streak pattern is formed within an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal, the undesirable characteristics of natural wood are avoided, and the steering wheel of the present invention can be easily manufactured in a minimal number of steps.

The Nakada reference is directed to a manufacturing method for a molded article. In particular, a *wooden surface layer 4* is placed in a mold 11 (see column 3, lines 33-40). A foam resin

material 3 is then supplied into the mold inside the wooden surface layer 4 so as to be arranged between a core wire 2 and the wooden surface layer 4 (see column 4, lines 36-42). Thus, as illustrated in the sectional views of Figures 3 and 5, the molded article disclosed in the Nakada reference includes an actual *wooden* outer surface layer 4. Consequently, the Nakada reference does not disclose or even suggest arcuate-shaped and elongated rim elements, in which each of the elongated rim elements has an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal, with an outer surface annular streak pattern, as recited in amended independent claim 15.

Nonetheless, the Examiner asserts that the Nishibori '138 reference teaches a material that is made of a thermosoftening synthetic resin blended with woodmeal so as to form an annular streak pattern on an outer surface, and refers to column 2, lines 4-20 of the Nishibori '138 reference. However the Nishibori '138 reference discloses forming a synthetic wood *board* 11 with a surface wood grain pattern 19, 21 (see column 4, lines 41-61 and Figures 6 and 7 of the Nishibori reference). For example, the Nishibori '138 reference discloses a thin board having a thickness of 2mm or less, which can be used as a plate material, a paper wall material, or a decorative plate attached to a surface of ordinary plywood (see column 5, lines 16-22). However, the Nishibori '138 reference does not disclose or even suggest *arcuate-shaped* and elongated rim elements each having an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal, with an outer surface annular streak pattern as recited in amended independent claim 15.

Moreover, it is submitted that one of ordinary skill in the art would not be motivated to combine the Nakada reference and the Nishibori '138 reference as suggested by the Examiner. Specifically, as explained above, the Nakada reference teaches that the molded article has an *outer wooden surface layer 4*. Therefore, because the molded element disclosed in the Nakada reference already has an *actual* outer wooden surface layer with the corresponding wood grain appearance, there would be no reason to modify the Nakada reference using the Nishibori '138 reference so as to provide elongated rim elements having an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal with an outer surface annular streak pattern as recited in independent claim 15. Furthermore, since the Nishibori '138 reference merely discloses a synthetic wood *board*, it is

not seen how the combination of such a synthetic board and the steering wheel of the Nakada reference could be combined to obtain the present invention.

As explained above, the Nakada reference and the Nishibori reference do not, either alone or in combination, disclose or suggest *arcuate-shaped* and elongated rim elements each having an *outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal*, with an outer surface annular streak pattern. Furthermore, because the Nakada reference already has an actual outer surface wooden layer 4, there would be no motivation to modify the Nakada reference with the synthetic board of the Nishibori '138 reference so as to obtain rim elements having an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal, as recited in claim 15. Therefore, one of ordinary skill in the art would not be motivated to modify or combine the Nakada reference and the Nishibori '138 reference so as to obtain the invention recited in amended independent claim 15.

The Young, Jr. reference, the Kiyoshi reference, and the Uchida reference also do not, either alone or in combination, disclose or suggest an annular rim section including arcuate-shaped and elongated rim elements mounted on a core, in which each of the elongated rim elements has an outer surface of thermosoftening synthetic resin material and woodmeal with an outer surface annular streak pattern extending along a longitudinal axis thereof. Therefore, one of ordinary skill in the art would not be motivated by any of these references to modify the Nakada reference and/or the Nishibori '138 reference so as to obtain the invention recited in amended independent claim 15. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that amended independent claim 15 and the claims that depend therefrom are clearly patentable over the prior art of record.

In addition to the above distinctions, dependent claim 28 recites subject matter that further distinguishes the present invention from the prior art. However, in the Office Action of September 9, 2003, the Examiner asserted that dependent claim 28 does not specifically define the metes and bounds of the phrase "uniform thickness" and, therefore, one of ordinary skill in the art could conclude that the second rim element 114 of the Uchida reference includes a uniform thickness *at a location where the element 114 contacts the core 7 along the entire core circumference*. However, the Examiner's position is somewhat confusing and clearly incorrect, as explained below.

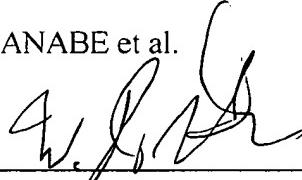
Firstly, it would be clear to one of ordinary skill in the art that the term “uniform thickness” describes the *entire* second rim element, rather than only a portion of the second rim element. In other words, claim 28 recites “a second rim element having a uniform element,” rather than merely reciting that the second rim element has a *portion* having a uniform thickness. The Examiner, however, appears to incorrectly interpret dependent claim 28 as requiring that the second rim element just has a *portion* having a uniform thickness, because the Examiner explains on page 6 of the Office Action that the second rim element 114 of the Uchida reference has a thickness *near the core 7* that is substantially equal to the diameter of the core 7 (i.e., only a portion of the rim element 114 has the desired thickness).

Secondly, it is not clear why the Examiner believes that the metes and bounds of the phrase “uniform thickness” are not clearly defined. The well-known ordinary meaning of the term “uniform,” as defined in *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, is “having always the same form,” and “not varying or variable.” In other words, it is clear that the ordinary meaning of the subject limitation is that the entire thickness of the second rim element does not vary. Because the second rim element 114 of the Uchida reference *clearly* has a thickness that varies depending on the location, it is submitted that the Uchida reference does not disclose or suggest a second rim element having a uniform thickness as recited in dependent claim 28.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is submitted that the present application is now in condition for allowance. However, if the Examiner should have any comments or suggestions to help speed the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact the Applicant's undersigned representative.

Respectfully submitted,

Jun TANABE et al.

By: 

W. Douglas Hahm  
Registration No. 44,142  
Attorney for Applicants

WDH/gtg  
Washington, D.C. 20006-1021  
Telephone (202) 721-8200  
Facsimile (202) 721-8250  
March 9, 2004